

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Akira Hamamura, 85, retired trucker, salesman, and pineapple cannery worker

*"In that neighborhood [of Kalihi] there were five or six houses of Japanese. The land was full of kiawe. There were cows so all the houses had fences; the Portuguese let the cows roam free. I guess they [the Portuguese] milked the cows and sold the milk."*

Akira Hamamura, Japanese, was born on August 7, 1899, aboard the China-Go, a vessel transporting immigrants to Hawaii. His parents were immigrants from a farming community in Oshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken, Japan. After arriving in the islands, the Hamamuras lived in Moiliili for a year or two. They then moved to Kapahulu where they kept honeybees and raised pigs. Akira's father also supplemented the family income by working as a stonecutter.

While in Kapahulu, Akira helped tend the bees, collected kiawe beans, and made charcoal at the end of each school day.

From 1909 to 1916, the Hamamuras again lived in Japan. They returned to Honolulu in 1916 and made their home in Kalihi. Akira's father ran an express business while Akira worked at Honolulu Soda Works. In 1927, Akira took over his father's business and continued it for twenty-five years. He later found employment at Libby's pineapple cannery and retired from cannery employment in 1964.

Akira still lives in Kalihi and participates in senior citizens' programs at the Susannah Wesley Center.

Tape No. 11-2-1-83J

## NARRATIVE FROM RECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Akira Hamamura

December 5, 1983

Kalihi, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama

[Oral history narrative based on a tape-recorded interview conducted in Japanese by Michiko Kodama. Translation by Rieko Tamano; editing by Michiko Kodama.]

[My parents] were from Ōshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken. They were farmers but my dad didn't like farming so they came to Hawaii. It was when my parents were coming to Hawaii [that] I was born on sea near Hawaii on August 7, 1899.

After arriving in Hawaii, [my parents] lived around Moiliili. I suppose they worked in Moiliili for a year or two. Then there was a good place in Kapahulu so they moved there. There, they kept honeybees and raised pigs; and Dad cut stone. Break the stone, then cut them into cubes. The old American Factors building and others were built with stone my dad cut. [To cut the stone], they used five-pound hammers and chisels; [and] used ten-pound hammers when breaking up big stones. My mom picked kiawe beans and taro. She picked [taro] from the fields for the Chinese, who gave her the leaves and stems, I heard, to feed the pigs. I heard she did that kind of work.

You know where Waialae Avenue is now. Below there used to be all taro patch. Above used to be vegetable [farms], but from around there to the cemetery above the Kuhio School, that was all taro patch.

[So, my parents,] they didn't work with sugar cane. They did their own work because this is a free country. They did the kind of work they wanted to do.

When I got bigger, I used to pick kiawe beans and help my dad [after school]. Every week when the kiawe blossoms were blooming we had to collect the honey. We'd squeeze the honey and put it in five-pound cans and send them to the U.S. A haole used to come to buy them. Apparently, they made perfume or something with it, not eat it.

Then later, there was a time when we moved to the area around the water pumping station in Kapahulu, and we stopped raising pigs. Then we cut

down the kiawe trees and made charcoal. We chopped up the upper part of the trees and we went to Chinatown to sell them. My dad did things like that and we ate a lot of honey there, too.

[Around 1909,] we sold that place and went back to Japan. Grandmother got sick and asked us to come back, so I guess we went home. I didn't want to go home but if everybody went, I'd have nowhere to go so I went.

[At first I thought our place in Japan was a] lonely place. Actually I was not lonely but couldn't communicate because I didn't understand Japanese very well. At first, I was in the third grade. Then I learned quickly so my grades were good and I was always number one or number two [in class]. In the fourth grade, I was at the head of the class. [School] was easy, there was no English. It's easy if you study Japanese for eight hours or so.

[From 1909 to 1916] I stayed in Ōshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken. [Then] we came back to [Hawaii]. My dad [who had returned to Hawai'i earlier] said he hurt his eyes, please everybody come back. So, we came back. But, his eyes were all right, really. It was a lie. It was a lie to bring everybody back, he sent a letter like that for everybody to come.

That time, we lived on School Street, [near] the place, called, "Pupule House," [an institution for the mentally disturbed]. We lived on School Street for a while. [Then] on Dillingham [Boulevard], the number was 1477 Dillingham. [In that neighborhood,] there were five or six houses of Japanese. The land was full of kiawe. There were cows so all the houses had fences; the Portuguese let the cows roam free. I guess they [the Portuguese] milked the cows and sold the milk.

My dad, on wagon with horse(s), did an express business--transporting merchandise from the store to the pier or from the pier to the store. And, I worked at Honolulu Soda Works. My first pay was twenty dollars [a month]. They gave us twenty dollars in gold coins for washing bottles and pouring soda into the bottles. Then there was an opportunity to be a salesman there. Somebody asked me to do it. And, it was difficult. [I went] all over the island--Kailua, Waimanalo, Kahaluu--but not downtown at all, except for Kalihi. In Kalihi, there was Yamane Store, Yoshida Store, Fuji Store, Nishihara Store and others.

Then, in 1926, I got married and [took over the express business when my dad returned to Japan the following year]. For about twenty-five years, I did that. [But, at times,] I didn't have any work. It wasn't busy so I couldn't make money. But, there wasn't anything else to do so I continued with it until I joined Libby's [pineapple cannery].

I had a friend who pulled me in. [At the pineapple cannery] I'd watch and learn everything--I was a mechanic and fireman in the boiler room. I worked there until I retired in 1964.

# **KALIHI:** **Place of Transition**

**Vol. I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL  
HISTORY PROJECT**

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